

14 April 1975

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM\*

SUBJECT: Inputs to General Weyand's Congressional Briefing

What are the Comparative Strengths and Weaknesses of the Two Sides?

1. During the past month, the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) relinquished control over two-thirds of the country, lost nearly half of their regular combat forces, and suffered heavy equipment and supply losses. The military leadership was demoralized, but has now at least partly recovered its nerve. The morale and discipline of the remaining government forces, however, are still open to question. The will to resist has always been a key variable in any appreciation of the military situation in Vietnam, and the debacle that befell South Vietnamese forces in Military Regions (MR) 1 and 2 initially raised serious questions whether South Vietnam's will to resist had collapsed. The final returns are not yet in, but in the fighting over the past week or so, ARVN units have shown that they are not simply willing to give up without a fight. This has been particularly evident in the heavy fighting around Xuan Loc, where thus far the South Vietnamese have acquitted themselves well. ARVN units in the delta have also shown a willingness to stand up to Communist pressure and have inflicted heavy casualties on the Communists in the fighting.

2. Recognizing the GVN's military vulnerability, Hanoi has committed: the bulk of its infantry divisions from the North; additional armor, artillery, and air defense units; and very large numbers of replacement troops to bring existing combat forces in the South up to full strength. As a result, Communist regular combat forces in South Vietnam have increased to 237,000, compared to 193,000 government troops, marking the first time in the history of the war that Communist regular combat forces have outnumbered GVN combat forces in South Vietnam as a whole. In terms of firepower assets -- tanks, artillery, and air capability -- the GVN on paper still has an advantage in the southern one-third of the country, but the North Vietnamese have not yet fully committed their armor, artillery, and AAA in the area.

3. At present, there are eight North Vietnamese infantry divisions in MRs 3 and 4. An additional twelve divisions are farther north in South Vietnam and the Laotian Panhandle, many of which can easily and quickly move into

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MR 3. There are indications that at least five are probably now doing so. Moreover, another division in North Vietnam is now preparing to move south, most likely to the COSVN area. Hanoi is also sending additional large antiaircraft/artillery forces -- perhaps as much as a full division -- and armor to the COSVN area. These deployments apparently are intended to establish a decisive military superiority and bring about "total victory" in 1975, as called for in recent COSVN instructions. Most of these forces should be in place within a month. Communist logistic capabilities will be sufficient to support such forces.

4. The GVN currently has eight infantry divisions, rangers, territorial forces, and the remnants of three divisions extracted from the north. At least one additional division evacuated from MR 1 is to be reconstituted by the end of the month, but its combat effectiveness will be open to question. Some territorial forces are now being integrated into regular ARVN units. Finally, despite large losses of aircraft resulting from the evacuation, the GVN still retains a sizable air force with about 300 fixed-wing aircraft and about 575 helicopters in the inventory.

5. Despite the Communist edge country-wide, the RVNAF in MRs 3 and 4 have for the moment a heavy advantage in the number of regular combat troops (see map). There are currently 193,000 South Vietnamese troops in active units, all operating in the two southern regions, a figure which could be increased by about 15,000 by the end of April if plans to reconstitute one airborne and one marine brigade and the 2d Infantry Division are successful. The Communists, however, have the ability to mass greatly superior forces on targets of their own choosing, stretching the ARVN's defensive lines thin and forcing it to react to such massing. In addition, although only about 68,000 Communist regular combat troops are presently in MRs 3 and 4, as many as 60,000 others may now be enroute from the north. The Communists could rapidly deploy more if needed.

6. The RVNAF's former advantage in firepower assets has been diminished. This has resulted not only from substantial South Vietnamese equipment losses during the past month but also from the current buildup of already large Communist inventories of artillery, armor, and air defense weapons, including SA-2 missiles. Although the ARVN has about a five to one advantage in field artillery, the Communists enjoy the edge in long-range guns. The latter also now has nearly twice as many tanks as the GVN. Moreover, while the bulk of South Vietnam's air force is intact, the sizable Communist air defense structure and the use of SA-7 missiles will mitigate the effectiveness of South Vietnamese air operations in many areas. This is particularly true along the corridors leading toward Saigon in the provinces north of the capital where the Communists' air defense forces in MR 3 are now concentrated.

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## Communist and South Vietnamese Regular Combat Forces in South Vietnam

*South Vietnam**Regular Combat Forces*

VC/NVA <sup>1</sup>	RVNAF <sup>2</sup>
237,000	193,000

1. Includes VC/NVA personnel in ground combat, combat support, and air defense units and local force companies and platoons.

2. RVNAF Ground Order of Battle. Includes assigned personnel in ARVN/VNMC ground combat and combat support units, and Regional Force battalions. Additional troops are presently refitting after the retreat from MRs 1 and 2.

3. Now deploying into country.

**MR 3**

VC/NVA	RVNAF
39,000	105,000

341st	Marine
9th	Airborne
7th	25th
6th	18th
377th AAA	5th
75th Arty Cmd	Regional
27th Sap Cmd	Forces

**MR 4**

VC/NVA	RVNAF
29,000	88,000

8th	21st
5th	9th
4th	7th
3d	Regional Forces

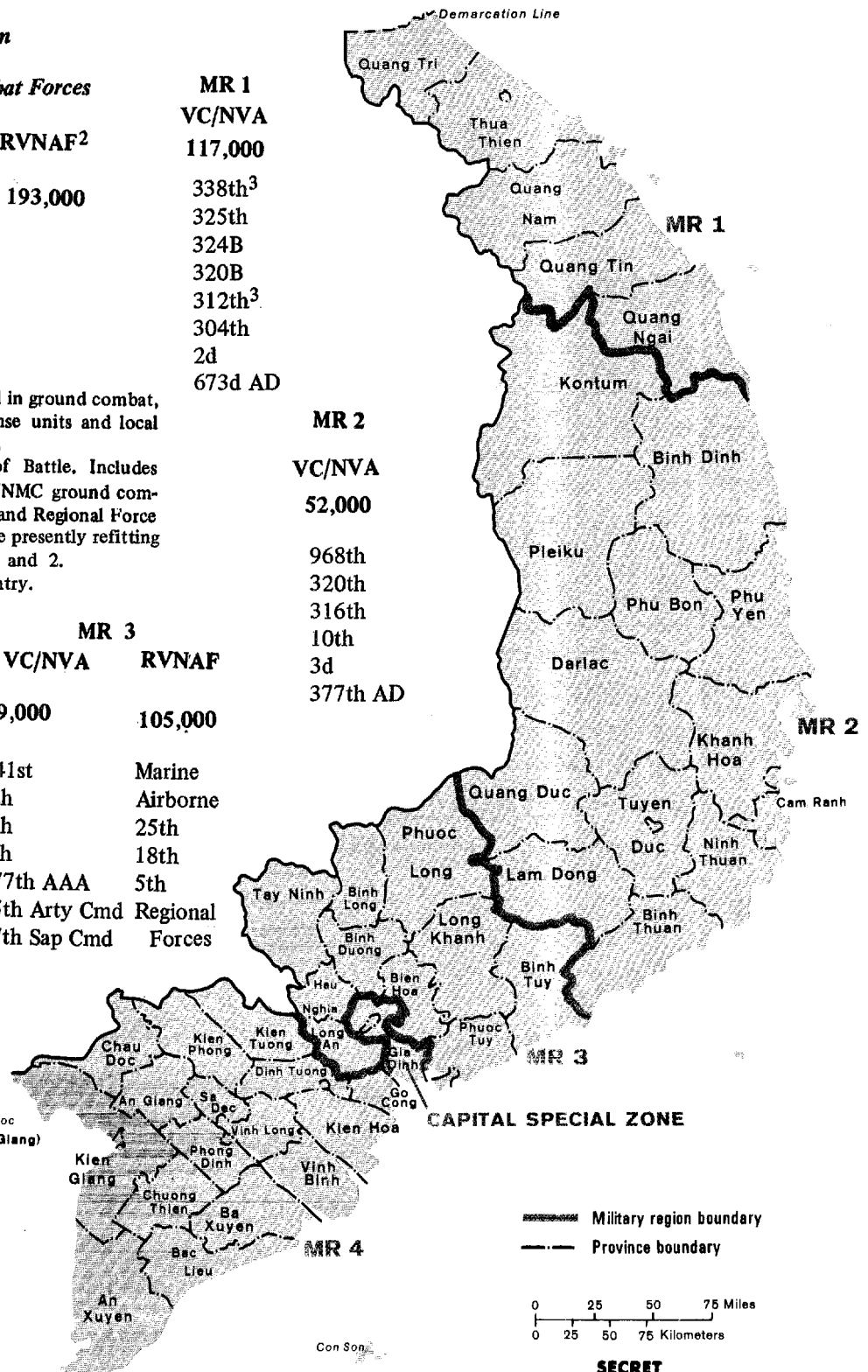
**MR 1**  
VC/NVA  
117,000

338th<sup>3</sup>  
325th  
324B  
320B  
312th<sup>3</sup>  
304th  
2d  
673d AD

**MR 2**

VC/NVA  
52,000

968th  
320th  
316th  
10th  
3d  
377th AD



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What are North Vietnam's Military Options? Describe a Worst Case, a Most Likely Case, and a Best Case (from the GVN's Viewpoint).

1. The strategic balance in South Vietnam has tilted sharply in favor of the Communists in recent weeks, and they now have sufficient combat forces to choose among several courses of military action.
2. In a worst case scenario, the Communists would quickly mass all or most of their military resources and then attempt to overwhelm the remaining government forces defending the provinces around Saigon. Under this course of action, the Communists would transfer virtually all of their in-country divisions and all of their reserves from North Vietnam to MRs 3 and 4.
3. The most likely scenario, however, is a continuation of the one the Communists now seem to be following. Although not all Communist divisions are being committed to the Saigon area, the evidence indicates that up to six additional NVA divisions are probably moving south. At the same time, events of the past week suggest that the Communists may have chosen a strategy which calls for using their existing forces to wear down the South Vietnamese and make new gains while additional units move into the area. The Communists have captured large chunks of territory and hundreds of thousands of people in recent weeks, and they probably will use some of their in-country forces to consolidate those gains and establish firm control.
4. Recent reporting indicates that the Communists intend to launch a three-pronged attack against Saigon's outer defenses during April. Attacks are planned from the south, the west, and the east. The heavy fighting at Xuan Loc appears to be the first of these attacks. Communist units are still moving into position for the other assaults. The Communists presumably believe that even if they lost these battles they will have hurt government units and set the stage for decisive battles in coming weeks. By that time, the Communists will have the forces available to launch massive attacks against Saigon itself.
5. A possible "best case" scenario would occur if the Communists committed their forces in a piecemeal fashion, thus enabling the GVN to use its firepower and mobility to maximum advantage. If the Communists followed this course and proved unable to coordinate attacks on several fronts in MRs 3 and 4, the remaining government forces might be able to cope with the situation for the next one or two months, although attrition would take its toll.

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What are South Vietnam's Military Options at this Point? Describe a Worst Case, Best Case, and Most Likely Case (from the GVN's Viewpoint).

1. The South Vietnamese can also react in three general ways. In a worst case there could be a collapse as there was in MRs 1 and 2. Such a collapse could come about at any time and with little warning. If, for example, GVN forces at Xuan Loc break or are overwhelmed, the rest of the units in MR 3 could simply cave in.

2. In a best case scenario, South Vietnam would be given the time and materiel to rebuild some of the units which were shattered in the retreat from the north. South Vietnamese forces could gain such time if they decisively engaged and destroyed a major portion of the NVA presence at Xuan Loc.

3. The probable case is that the GVN becomes increasingly heavily engaged -- as it is now at Xuan Loc. In this case, South Vietnamese forces -- or at least most of them -- would continue to fight on until overwhelmed.

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What is a Logical Concept for the Defense of the Saigon Area?

1. Based on current dispositions and expected force availability, a mobile defense of sectors in the area north of Saigon -- Phuoc Tuy, Long Khanh, Binh Duong, and southern Tay Ninh and Hau Nghia provinces -- would provide the best protection for the Saigon area.

2. In MR 3 the concept envisions the creation of four military sectors, one each in the general area of operations of the four ARVN infantry divisions, that is the 25th, the 5th, the 18th, and, as it is rebuilt, the 2d. All forces, including territorial forces, would be commanded by the ARVN division commander in his sector.

- The 2d ARVN Division sector would be established in Phuoc Tuy Province using most of the GVN forces evacuated from MRs 1 and 2 in reconstituted units or as filler personnel. Initially, security in Phuoc Tuy would be the responsibility of the regional forces.
- The 18th ARVN Division would seize Chau Chan mountain, a prominent terrain feature north of Xuan Loc in Long Khanh Province, and would protect the eastern approaches to Saigon and deny Communist artillery and rocket fire on Bien Hoa air base.
- Simultaneously, the 5th ARVN Division would move southwest from its present position at Ben Cat to protect the Saigon River corridor.
- The 25th ARVN Division would complete its withdrawal from Tay Ninh City to the vicinity of Go Dau Hau and Trang Bang, defending the Route 1 and Route 19 corridors to Saigon. This operation would have to be well-planned and executed to preclude an unraveling process similar to what occurred in MRs 1 and 2.
- The force structure in MR 4 would remain generally as it is -- three ARVN divisions.

3. The ability of a rebuilt mobile reserve consisting of the Marines and the Airborne to move quickly to counter the Communists' main thrust is a vital feature of this plan. The key forces still to be rebuilt are the 3d Airborne Brigade and two Marine brigades. A capability and recognition of the need to carry the attack to the Communists must exist at all levels of the RVNAF if there is to be any chance of success for this plan.

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Can the Present Situation be Compared to Tet 1968?

1. It is misleading to draw a parallel between the present situation and that of Tet 1968. The following portrays the major differences between the two situations:

<u>TET 1968</u>	<u>PRESENT</u>
Communists previously on the defensive	Communists have the initiative
Manpower balance clearly favored the GVN	Manpower balance around Saigon still favors GVN, but Communists have available forces to change situation quickly
Communists faced combined GVN, US, and other Allied forces	Communists face only GVN forces
Owing to quasi-covert nature of preparations, Communists had element of surprise and managed to infiltrate into Saigon	GVN anticipates attack and Communists will have to fight their way into capital with conventional forces
Communists relied heavily on local forces and guerrillas	Communists have large, well-equipped conventional army
Communists lacked armor, artillery, and AAA	Communists have large amounts of armor, artillery, and AAA
Communists confronted with heavy US bombing	No US bombing and reduced GVN air capability
Most Communist units had been engaged in previous fighting	Many Communist units, including strategic reserve divisions, have been engaged in little fighting
Many Communist units involved in fighting away from Saigon area	Communists can shift most of their forces to the battle areas around Saigon.

2. We are providing two graphics with this memorandum which depict the deployment of Communist forces around Saigon in January 1968 and in April 1975. The graphic showing the situation in January 1968 indicates the location both of Communist divisional headquarters and of independent regiments and battalions not subordinate to any of the divisions. Since the war in 1968 was in significant measure a local force and guerrilla war, it is important that the units

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making up these local forces -- which were in the main the so-called "independent" regiments and battalions -- be included in any graphic presentation. The graphic for April 1975, on the other hand, shows only the locations of Communist divisional headquarters, since the war at present is almost totally a conventional, big-unit type of war.

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